The Wayback Machine - https://web.archive.org/web/20030525110452/http://www.communitypresbyterian.com:80/sermons/62302.htm

Ephesians: Do You Feel Inadequate?

Ephesians 2:8-10

Thomas Michael Smith
CPC 6/23/02

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

This morning we begin to touch on one of the major passages in all the Bible that deal with the concept of God's grace. The word 'grace' means kindness and unmerited favor. We can become God's display in God's display case *because* God has showered his grace upon us. There's no way we get into the display case to show off God's goodness on our own steam. God chooses us and showers blessing upon us. That's how it happens.

But notice the tense of the verb. You have been *saved*. This refers back to the three-fold relationship set forth previously in this sermon series. We have been made alive in Christ. We have been raised up with Christ. And we have been made to sit in the heavenly places. What these realities mean is, we have been given a new identity - we are no longer what we once were. We are no longer associated with Adam - we are in Christ, and Christ is our life.

This is so important. We now face every day, every moment, no longer as a child of a fallen condition, but as a son or daughter of the living God. This distinction makes all the difference in the world! It defines whether you approach life feeling inadequate, guilty, rejected, and lonely, or whether you are filled with confidence, certainty, acceptance, love and warmth. It makes all the difference as to how you begin your day and how you think of yourself before God.

Most of us have either read enough psychology or had enough therapy to understand the truth that if you don't see yourself as a worthwhile person, accepted before God and of great importance to him, you can't see anyone else that way. If you demand performance of yourself because you think the only way God will accept you is if you do lots of stuff, then you will be the kind of person that demands performance from other people before you accept them. If this is the kind of person you are, you will not be able to forgive others. You will be caught up in a web of perfectionism in which you are constantly feeling guilty yourself, because you don't live up to your own ideals.

The only thing that can deliver you from this kind of thinking, from this kind of being, is that through faith in Jesus Christ, you have a new identity, and a new power. We are raised up together with him. His power is available to us in the simplicity of the ordinary circumstances of our lives. The Holy Spirit walks beside you and seeks to communicate with you in all ways, not just overtly spiritual ways. I often pray for a parking space. I don't say to myself, that's too small a thing to ask of God, it's insignificant in the scheme of things. Nope. I remember that in Jesus I have abundant life, and I have no problem asking for some parking abundance. I figure God can say no, but he can't say anything if I don't ask.

So with a new identity in Jesus Christ, and a new power available to us through the Holy Spirit, we see God present in us, releasing through us his life, a touch of heaven upon our earthly condition. So we can enter into a new attitude. We are made to sit together with him in the heavenly places. We are to rest in him and let him carry the load, to be freed from strain, and

anxiety, and fear of what the outcome will be. It's his responsibility to work it out, and for heaven's sake, he's got the staying power to make it happen.

If you're thinking I am just blowing theological smoke or off on some doctrinal gig, you are missing the point big time! These are realities which make the difference as to how life is lived, what your days are like, and what your tomorrows will be. And, as Paul reminds us here, the basis of all this has already been accomplished. The whole of your future development, not only in this age but in the ages to come, rests upon a foundation which already has been laid. God is not going to add another thing to the foundation. He will simply help you work out your life, day by day, on the basis of understanding what has already happened.

Now, this saves you from the silly running around after every new theological fad that comes along, and every new book that comes out, and every new program that comes along, and from thinking you need to have some vast new experience which will change your whole life. Nope. You only need grasp and understand more fully, and then put into practice, the riches of God's grace already provided for you in Jesus Christ. Every single advance in your spiritual life to come rests on this simple foundation.

Paul stresses that we didn't have anything to do with this. You and I didn't add to this at all. It's God's activity. We didn't originate it and it's not our own doing. We wouldn't have come up with a redemptive program in which we die - human beings never plan to die. In fact, death is what we fear the most. Yet, God has worked out a way by which our old life can end, can die, can be put aside. We never could have thought that up. But God did. So it's not of our doing. And it's not of our deserving. We have no merit here. It's not of works, Paul says. We can't earn it. It's all of grace. It's given to us, day by day, from the hand of God.

And of course the other reason God did it this way, and does it this way, is so we human beings may never boast. Do you know what boasting is? Boasting is pretending you are something you are not. When you boast, you are saying, 'I'm my own creator, my own god, and I have in myself what it takes to handle life, and nobody contributes to me, and I am sufficient in myself.' But that's a lie because we are not self-sufficient. Each one of us is a dependent creature.

And one of the realities of existence is that God never allows self-deception to stand. God is an utter realist. He deals with life exactly as it is. So he says that all you and I can contribute is to receive his grace, to simply take it, moment by moment to accept the relationship we have been given, and moment by moment to utilize the power he gives us through the Holy Spirit, and at each moment to rest in the fantastic fact that he will solve all the riddles which arise, so that he can accomplish the ends he has promised. Our partnering with him to do his projects is the way he graciously allows us to participate with him in the furtherance of his glory, but he'll bear the brunt of the effort. So our first and best question is always the same - 'God, what gig are we working together on today?'

Boasting in your faith would be like boasting in the fact that you reached out to take a check from somebody. Suppose you have a tremendous debt but someone offers to pay it for you and writes out a check for $500,000. And you reach out and take

it from him. How absurd it would be if you then went around saying to everybody, 'Isn't it wonderful that I had what it took to reach out and grab that check?'

Someone might look at you and say, 'Wasn't it marvelous that he paid that debt for you?' Well, what if I said to that, 'Oh, he didn't do anything much; I took the check! After all, if I hadn't taken the check, what good would it have done for him to give it in the first place?' This would be like the 'doublespeak' in *Animal Farm,* where we're all equal but some of us are more equal than the others. It's just silly to think like this, and sometimes we have to get beyond being polite and just tell people they are being silly in things they say that just don't make any sense. It is the resource of God that makes all of this possible, not my acceptance of his gift.

And, as Paul concludes this section with verse ten, we can see the ultimate manifestation of this grace, that we become God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. We become God's showpiece in his display case. He works out in our lives a tremendous exhibition and demonstration of his wisdom, his power, his love, his character, his peace, and his joy. He is teaching us, training us, bringing us along, applying the paint in exactly the right places, producing a marvelous masterpiece to be put on display. This is to result in good works: kindness, love, mercy, compassion, help one another, meeting one another's needs.

God prepares these situations ahead of time. This is the *Prayer of Jabez* - when we ask God to bless us, God finds ways to enlarge our territory, and when we take him up on the enlargement, the expansion of our ministry, his hand is there with us, guiding us to do what he prepared ahead of time for us to accomplish. It is very, very exciting! God prepares the works ahead of time - all I do is step into them.

Let these thoughts rest in your heart and mind, give thanks to God for what he *has done* in Jesus Christ, and for the fact that this opens to us fantastic possibilities which stretch from this moment on, beyond death into the coming ages, age following upon age. Very, very cool.

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

These sermons were all given orally at Community Presbyterian Church for the benefit of the congregation and any visitors. They are reproduced here as a service to those who were unable to attend the respective worship service. No claim to originality of material is implied, nor are these sermons to be understood to be published in any sense."

Castles INFORMATION NETWORK